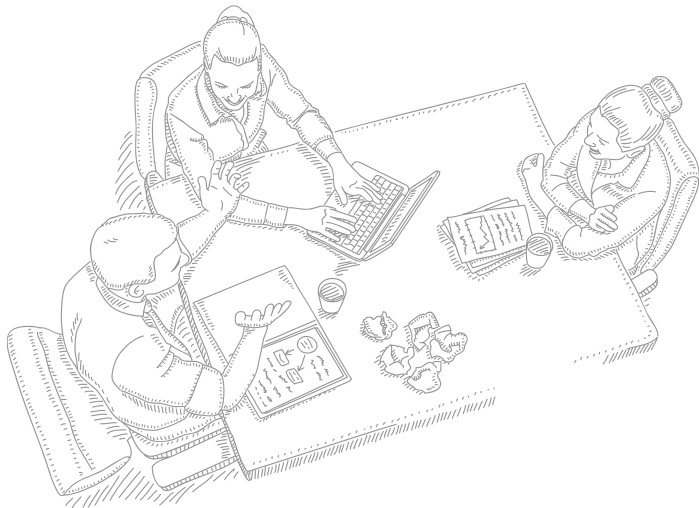# A Year in an SPS Chapter

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With spring upon us, many SPS chapters are holding elections and considering who will lead the group into the next academic year. Whether you are interested in elected office or not, just being a member of your local chapter means you have the ability and even the responsibility to improve the health of your chapter and make it the best it can be. To do this effectively, it's helpful to understand the life cycle of a group—how groups coalesce and learn to thrive.

One helpful model for understanding chapter development is Tuckman and Jensen's model of group development.[1] Their assertion was that while every group will have its own personality, successes, and challenges, groups tend to follow similar patterns in how they learn to function and progress through a series of stages. They use the mnemonic of Forming – Storming – Norming – Performing – Adjourning to capture each of these points. How long each group spends in each stage can vary, but the progression generally stays consistent. Let's explore each one and how you might be able to implement activities for your chapter that take advantage of your stage. **//**

1. Tuckman, Bruce W., & Jensen, Mary Ann C. (1977). "Stages of small group development revisited," *Group and Organizational Studies,* 2, 419–427.

2. Adapted from "Group Development," (2015). A presentation by the Office of Student Activities and Involvement at James Madison University.

Characteristics

Stage	Characteristics
Forming	• Typical of early in the school year • New people are checking out the group amid other orientation activities • Hopes for the year are high, and people have a positive outlook on group dynamics
Storming	• Conflict among members as differing priorities and expectations emerge • Dwindling membership as potential prospects and members shift their time and interests to classwork and other priorities • Lack of trust among members, officers, and possibly advisors
Norming	• Chapters "hit their stride" and figure out programs and activities that suit the time, interests, and talents of their group • Clear expectations and roles for officers • Advisors are available as resources, but students take the lead in planning and executing activities
Performing	• Group excels at identifying and solving problems • Individual members understand and adapt to various roles • New leaders begin to emerge • Energy and morale within the group are high
Adjourning	• Intentional transition as students graduate and new officers are elected • A time of closure and reflection on shared experiences

Suggested activities[2]	Keep in mind...
• Fun icebreakers/get-to-know-you games • Review of mission and purpose of the group with new members • Social activities with food (BBQs, pizza parties, etc.) • A splashy demo at a campus fair • Regular officer meetings to establish roles and expectations • Connect with AZC and ZC to get ideas and best practices from other chapters in your zone	Your chapter should have an intentional plan for welcoming newcomers. Avoid inside jokes and being cliquish to ensure that your chapter continues to grow.
• A workshop on communication skills or conflict resolution styles • Officer meetings to review and clarify roles • Remind everybody that this stage is a natural part of group development and that they will emerge stronger	Conflict and disagreements are healthy and normal! The Storming stage can be challenging, but try to stay engaged with it and put yourself in the shoes of those you find yourself in conflict with. If you find yourself stuck in the Storming stage for a long time, try seeking an outside mediator from your campus student organization office or seek guidance from SPS National.
• Strive for a variety of activities, including outreach/service, research, fellowship, and professional development • Design a t-shirt or button for chapter to advertise across campus • Consider starting a new tradition, like a design competition, demo show, or outreach event • Write a Marsh White or Chapter Research Award proposal	Take time for members to engage in social activities as well as programmatic tasks to strengthen interpersonal relationships and avoid regressing to the "Storming" stage.
• Begin to work on your Chapter Report to document what went well and what can be improved upon for the future • Take an active role in leading part of your zone meeting • Nominate your advisor for Outstanding Chapter Advisor Award • Encourage members to apply for internships and scholarships	This is a good time for graduating students to consciously step back and allow younger students to lead and excel.
• Organize your Sigma Pi Sigma induction ceremony as a special event for your department • Have a senior banquet or awards night to recognize the contributions of members who are graduating • Hold elections so new officers have the summer to plan, and have outgoing officers write transition reports to help their successors • Use your Chapter Report to reflect on what went well during the year and what you might do differently in the future • Contact SPS National to update contact information for officers and advisors	This can be an emotional time for chapter members or advisors who may be moving on. Be sure to celebrate and show appreciation for their contributions.